



Miriam Talis - Madison, WI



Norman Burns - JRDS Inc., Portland, IN



Kim Sandlin - Orange Grove Center, Chattanooga, TN



Paul Hoppe - Ypsilanti, MI



Jack Bruene - Des Moines, IA



All Americans

A Charge We Have to Keep

A Road Map to Personal and Economic Freedom
for People with Intellectual Disabilities





Josh Reed of Chattanooga's Orange Grove Center (with permission of Exceptional Parent Magazine)
A special thank you to Rick Rader, M.D., Editor-in-chief, Exceptional Parent Magazine.

This booklet was designed for Americans with intellectual disabilities, their families, neighbors and other Americans. It is important that the work of the President's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities be discussed by everyone.

The Charge

Dear Americans,

The United States is a nation that cares about everyone's success.

The President of the United States has a special committee that studies ideas and government programs that are important to people with intellectual disabilities. This Committee includes people with intellectual disabilities, their families and others. It also includes important leaders from Washington, D.C. This year, the Committee sent a report to the President.

The Committee's recommendations address many of the challenges and goals for people with intellectual disabilities as outlined in our President's New Freedom Initiative. This initiative was signed 12 days after President George W. Bush was sworn into office in 2001.

The New Freedom Initiative is designed to ensure that Americans with disabilities, including people with intellectual disabilities, have the chance to learn, develop skills, work, make choices about their daily lives, and be included in their communities. Providing ideas to make these goals a reality is what motivated the Committee.

The President's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities

Changing America



White House Photo by Paul Morris

In July 2003, America celebrated the 13th anniversary of an important law called the Americans with Disabilities Act. President George W. Bush celebrated that important day with a special announcement on the radio and an important decision. The President asked Americans not to use the words “mental retardation” anymore. He said everyone should use the words “intellectual disability” instead. The President believes that new words will make a difference in people’s lives because the old words were connected to the wrong idea about people with intellectual disabilities. To get America started, President Bush signed an important document that gave the President’s

Committee on Mental Retardation a new name. From now on that important committee will be called the President’s Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities. He invited the committee members who asked for that change to the Oval Office as he announced his decision.

“We are making good progress toward ensuring that persons with disabilities know the American Dream is meant for them ... more and more individuals with disabilities continue to become full participants in the American life.”

President George W. Bush, July 25, 2003

Assistive Technology

Technology can help people with intellectual disabilities learn, remember, read, work, speak, and live by themselves.



The nation's public schools, colleges and universities should explore exciting new technologies for people with intellectual disabilities.

The Charge — To develop technology that can provide new opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities at school, at work and at home to improve their lives.

Education

All children can learn. The most important lessons must be taught to all children.



Jonathan Barrett (right) lends a hand to Lisa Elliott

People with intellectual disabilities need lifelong learning opportunities that will help them get a job and develop a career. Colleges, universities, caseworkers, doctors and everyone else who supports people with intellectual disabilities must cooperate and work on the same goals.

The Charge — To set high expectations for children with intellectual disabilities and ensure that the nation's schools value their learning.

Employment

American businesses should hire people with intellectual disabilities because they too understand the values that built this country.



Albert Baker, courtesy of Orange Grove Center

Everyone must have the opportunity to find jobs, earn money and live independently. Tax laws and government policies must allow people with intellectual disabilities and their families to save money and work toward financial independence.

The Charge — To help more people with intellectual disabilities find jobs in American businesses and earn money.

Family Services and Support

America should have fair laws and strong systems of support.



AbleLink Technologies assists Jonathan Capshaw and Terry Litten in the discovery of technology.
Courtesy of AbleLink

People with intellectual disabilities want and need health care, support services, and homes with friends and family, just like all Americans. Often, getting these basic human freedoms and rights requires help from other people and the community.

Community and business leaders are needed as role models. They can teach others how to respect all Americans.

The Charge — To make sure that people with intellectual disabilities and their families get the support they need to enjoy basic American freedoms and rights.

A True Leader



Two things happened in the 1970s that made America stronger. Mia Peterson was born in Webster City, Iowa, in 1973 and the President of the United States signed an important special education law in 1975. Born with Down syndrome, Mia was among the first Americans with intellectual disabilities to have the right to attend neighborhood public schools. At these schools, children with intellectual disabilities can get the services they need to be successful. With this support and education, Mia became a successful citizen.

Mia lives independently in Ohio, where she enjoys running, swimming, bicycling and participating in church activities. She writes letters regularly to her family and friends and enjoys the company of her boyfriend.

Here is what Mia has achieved:

- She graduated from Webster City High School in 1993, and attended Xavier College;
- She participated in cross-country running, theater and speech competition;
- She has worked as an editor and columnist, and is a self-advocacy coordinator for the Down Syndrome Association of Greater Cincinnati.
- She now works as the support specialist at Hamilton County Board of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities;
- She is the owner of a business called Aiming High, which schedules speaking engagements and sells her musical CD, "I Am Here;"
- She has held leadership positions with the National Down Syndrome Society and her local YMCA. She has also testified before a U.S. Senate committee about the impact of the Americans with Disabilities Act;
- She was the Olympic torch-bearer in Cincinnati in 2002.

Public Awareness

Everyone can learn, work and be successful.



The Federal Government, community, and business leaders should work together to change America's attitudes about people with intellectual disabilities.

The Charge — To use new words to change old ideas ... Americans should use the term “intellectual disability,” not the words “mental retardation.”

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Madison, Wisconsin

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Corporation for National and
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Washington, DC

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Michele Tennery, Senior Associate,
Public Affairs

The Honorable Lex Frieden

Chairman, National Council on
Disability, Washington, DC

Represented by:

Milton Aponte, Esq.,
Council Member
Cooper City, Florida

PCPID STAFF

Sally Atwater,

Executive Director
Telephone: 202-260-1500
E-mail: Satwater@acf.hhs.gov

George N. Bouthilet, Ph.D.

Research Director
Telephone: 202-205-5408
E-mail: Gbouthilet@acf.hhs.gov

Laverdia T. Roach

Special Assistant to the
Executive Director
Telephone: 202-205-5970
E-mail: Lroach@acf.hhs.gov

Lena Stone, Program Specialist

Telephone: 202-205-7989
E-mail: Lstone@acf.hhs.gov

Sheila Whittaker, Budget Officer

Telephone: 202-260-0452
E-mail: Swhittaker@acf.hhs.gov

www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/pcpid

President's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities

The Aerospace Center, 370 L'Enfant Promenade, SW, Suite 701, Washington, DC 20447

Telephone: 202-619-0634 • Fax: 202-205-9519